UNITED
NATIONS

DP

Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme and of the United Nations Population Fund

Distr.
LIMITED

DP/1998/L.15
22 April 1998

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Second regular session 1998
20-24 April 1998, New York
Item 2 of the provisional agenda

REPORTS TO THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Draft report

UNDP report

1. The Administrator introduced the report to the Economic and Social Council for UNDP (DP/1998/14). He noted that it was prepared in a common format, jointly agreed upon by UNDP, UNFPA, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP). The report came at a particularly important time as 1998 would be a determining year with regard to the functioning of UNDP as well as to the nature and level of operational activities for development of the United Nations system as a whole. The triennial comprehensive policy review was under preparation, an exercise that would lead to Economic and Social Council and General Assembly resolutions evaluating the performance of UNDP and setting the strategy for United Nations development operations in the years to come. The report also highlighted the challenges UNDP, as all other development organizations, must face as it pursued its broad mandate in poverty eradication at a time when multilateral resources for development were declining.

2. He noted that the length of the report was constrained by Executive Board requirements and also that detailed information on the subjects covered in the report would be available in the annual report of the Administrator, to be submitted at the annual session 1998.

3. The triennial comprehensive policy review was currently in a state of advanced preparation and represented an opportunity to assess in detail many of the issues arising from operational activities that had been informally raised by Member States, including at the Economic and Social Council. UNDP had responded in detail to the questionnaires of the review and was collaborating with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs in the preparation of the report to the Council and to the General Assembly. The

Administrator emphasized that the starting point for the review should be the Secretary-General's reform programme as endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 52/12 A and B.

4. The Administrator gave an overview of three areas for discussion in connection with the report to the Economic and Social Council: the United Nations presence at the country level; the United Nations Development Assistance Framework; and funding issues.

5. The Secretary-General's reform had been instrumental in strengthening the United Nations presence at the country level through the resident coordinator system pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 48/209, 47/199 and 50/120. Discussions among the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) members and its Executive Committee were proceeding with regard to strengthening the resident coordinator system. As manager and funder of the resident coordinator system, and in view of the legislated link between the UNDP Resident Representative and the Resident Coordinator, as reaffirmed by the Secretary-General, UNDP was pursuing, with other programmes and funds, policies and concrete measures to strengthen the overall resident coordinator system. Measures in that respect included: widening the pool of qualified candidates (in the preceding year 11 out of 35 persons selected as resident coordinators had come from organizations other than UNDP); more specific competency assessments and appraisal methodologies; and comprehensive strategies to expand common premises and services.

6. UNDP had embarked, with the other UNDG members, on 18 pilot United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs). The first joint meeting of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA and UNICEF had been held in January 1998 to look at the pilot UNDAF experience of Viet Nam. An informal joint meeting to follow-up on the January meeting would be held during the present session of the Board. One issue that had arisen at the first regular session was the need for more work in streamlining programming instruments of various funds and programmes, with the overall aim of beginning the UNDAF at the start of a common programming cycle. Greater streamlining in the process was needed. UNDP believed that national ownership was essential to ensure conformity with the priorities of programme countries in which all United Nations system activities were anchored. A review of the UNDAF pilot process would commence in July 1998.

7. While the issue of funding was not discussed in detail in the report to the Economic and Social Council, the important process under the leadership of the Executive Board should be noted. The Open-Ended Ad Hoc Working Group was a very important mechanism in forging and intensifying the partnership with traditional and emerging donors, programme countries, the Secretariat and the Executive Board.

8. The Administrator noted that UNDP had continued to collaborate closely with the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS and at the country level, the capacity of the resident coordinator system was strengthened to support an expanded response to the epidemic. Increased funding and further mainstreaming was needed for enhanced normative and operational activities relating to HIV/AIDS.

9. On the follow-up to global conferences, in response to the Economic and Social Council resolution 1997/6, the Administrator pointed out that the inter-agency task forces created by the Administrative Committee on Coordination had served to encourage inter-agency teams at the country level, working under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator. As the task forces had been replaced by less formal networking arrangements, the UNDAF was essential to retaining their momentum. The global conferences had produced a profound effect on UNDP, including making poverty eradication the overriding objective of UNDP work. The fusion of normative arrangements at the global level had played a role in guiding the country cooperation frameworks (CCFs) as well as the UNDAF pilot exercises.

Discussion

10. Many delegations took the floor to comment on the report. They thanked the Administrator for his opening remarks, which provided analysis and information additional to the report. Most speakers encouraged UNDP to include more analysis, including charts and figures, and less description in future reports to the Economic and Social Council. The report should highlight the major points on which the Council could provide advice as well as identify problems. One delegation emphasized that the reports should help to enable progress in poverty eradication efforts in programme countries. Another delegation, supported by many others, requested that UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF prepare a consolidated list of actions on which the Council could provide advice to the funds and programmes for submission to the Council's 1998 substantive session. WFP could also be included in the exercise.

11. Several speakers welcomed the inclusion of information on the work of UNDG and on UNDAF in the report and Administrator's statement. The need to increase coordination, avoid overlap and ensure cost-effectiveness was emphasized. Further information on the differentiation among the programming instruments of the UNDAF, the country strategy note and the CCF was requested. United Nations specialized agencies must participate in the UNDAF process, according to many delegations. One delegation requested further information on the legal framework for the UNDG at the country level. Another underlined that the UNDAF should be under the leadership of the programme country and reflect ownership by that country. Information on how the sustainable human development mandate of UNDP fitted in with the mandates of UNFPA and UNICEF in the UNDAF process was requested. One delegation requested more information on the delays in implementing common services at the country level.

12. Measures taken to strengthen the resident coordinator system were welcomed. Those measures included the expansion of the pool of candidates for resident coordinator, including through staff secondments and enhanced selection and review criteria. A query was raised regarding the number of resident coordinators who came from other organizations in 1994 versus 1998 and how many women resident coordinators were currently serving. The issue of funding of the resident coordinator system would be discussed by the Economic and Social Council and during the triennial comprehensive policy review in the General Assembly. Several delegations commented on the funding and management of the resident coordinator system, with some suggesting that the costs for support of the system be shared among involved organizations. One delegation expressed

support for the continued designation of the UNDP Resident Representative as United Nations Resident Coordinator. Another delegation requested information on the designation of humanitarian coordinators who were different from the resident coordinator in a particular country.

13. One delegation, supported by another, requested systematic inclusion of sections on relations with the Bretton Woods institutions and on the preparations for participation in the humanitarian segment in future reports.

14. Many delegations expressed the view that concrete examples of lessons learned and good practices should have been included in the section on capacity-building and national execution, as well as with regard to the harmonization of programming cycles. Greater efforts were required to determine the common understanding of the definitions of capacity-building and national execution. Several delegations expressed their commitment to national execution. The need to refer to South-South cooperation in relation to national execution was mentioned by some speakers.

15. The emphasis on programme countries setting their own priorities was underlined by some delegations. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation for Development (OECD)/Development Assistance Committee (DAC) statement on "Development Partnerships in the New Global Context" (May 1995) was a useful reference in that regard.

16. The work to improve monitoring and evaluation activities was praised. However, more work was required in that area, in particular in relation to the CCFs, and with regard to updating current methods in light of the work of the UNDG. While enhanced project compliance was noted in some regions, others needed further efforts to increase compliance. Several speakers looked forward to receiving the evaluation compliance report at the annual session 1998. Queries were raised on progress in undertaking joint strategic evaluations and on the concept of rating of agencies mentioned on page 70 of the publication "Measuring and Managing Results: Lessons for Development Cooperation".

17. Several delegations expressed their support for UNDP funding of training activities held at the Staff College in Turin.

18. With reference to the cooperation of UNDP with civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations, one delegation questioned the reference contained in paragraph 58 of the document on the shift from representative to participatory democracy, stating that in his country's view that activity was outside of the domain of the Executive Board.

19. Comments from the secretariat on the progress of decentralized authority would be welcomed.

20. Some speakers asked for clarification of paragraph 44 of the document, stating that their delegations still had questions about the concept of multi-year contributions as a model for funding arrangements. One delegation requested that if reference to burden-sharing was included, then the report should also mention the possibility of maintaining voluntary funding

arrangements. Other measures could be explored, including through the private sector.

21. Progress in the follow-up to global conferences was noted by many delegations. One speaker requested further information on the degree to which resident coordinators were incorporating the programmes of action resulting from the conferences in country-level programming. Another speaker asked for information on the linkage and coordination of the work of the various inter-agency bodies on follow-up to conferences. One delegation requested further information on the "20/20" event in Hanoi and a copy of the report on social exclusion. Further references to the role of South-South cooperation in the follow-up to the World Summit on Social Development would be welcomed.

22. Some delegations stated that they were of the view that the contribution of UNDP to the field of human rights should emphasize the right to development and refer to work with programme countries in addressing poverty eradication. Speakers underlined the need for UNDP to avoid conditionality in its work.

23. Requests were made for more information on lessons learned from inter-agency cooperation in fighting the spread of HIV/AIDS.

24. Two delegations believed that the report should have included reference to the narrowing of the UNDP programme focus.

Response by the secretariat

25. The Administrator welcomed the proposal for a consolidated report by UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF to the Economic and Social Council.

26. With regard to the UNDAF process, he noted that United Nations specialized agencies were not yet formally participating in the process. The Administrative Committee on Coordination would need to agree formally on the inclusion of the specialized agencies in the UNDAF process. The linkage between the UNDAF and the resident coordinator system at the country level would need to be worked out. In response to a query, he stated that UNDP did not create country strategy notes in cases where the Government did not wish to have it. The CSN was a government-owned document and could be seen as representing the "demand side" of development cooperation whereas the UNDAF represented the supply-side response by the United Nations operational entities. The UNDAF was the equivalent of a UNDP advisory note, he stated, and could possibly replace that note at a future date. In response to a query, he noted that sustainable human development was an overarching concept that was applicable to most development assistance. He hoped that the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board could convene future joint meetings with the UNICEF Board as the UNDAF experience progressed.

27. In response to the comments made, he emphasized that resident coordinators did not want to be cut off from UNDP, which through its programme and administrative funding provided essential support for coordination. Seven resident coordinators had written to the Secretary-General on the necessity of having UNDP as an organizational base from which to operate the resident coordinator function. In response to the delegations who had suggested cost-sharing of the resident coordinator system, the Administrator stated that

cost-sharing of the support office at the country level would be welcomed as UNDP was currently responsible for funding the offices. However, UNDP had a mandate from the Secretary-General for funding and managing the resident coordinator system on behalf of the United Nations system. In line with that mandate, UNDP would need to continue to provide central funding for the resident coordinator to ensure the unity of management and funding as well as accountability.

28. The Administrator cited the following figures: of 131 resident coordinators, 11 out of 35 designated in 1997 were from organizations outside of UNDP, a figure which had resulted in the doubling of resident coordinators from outside the organization; 30 of the 131 resident coordinators were women; the goal for women resident coordinators was 40 per cent by the year 2001; 41 out of 131 resident coordinators had worked outside of UNDP in their careers; there were currently four United Nations houses - in Lebanon, Lesotho, Malawi and South Africa; and 30 other premises were virtually ready for designation as United Nations houses.

29. Inter-agency collaboration existed in the area of monitoring and evaluation, the Administrator noted, but strategic evaluations were needed. He expressed disappointment about the lack of progress in harmonization, an area that required greater encouragement from inter-governmental processes.

30. In response to the clarifications sought, the Administrator noted that the paper on multi-year funding referred to in paragraph 44 of the report had been requested by the office of the Secretary-General as an input from UNDP for the report of the Secretary-General to the Economic and Social Council on the financing of operational activities.

31. Progress had been seen on developing a common understanding of national execution and capacity-building. New guidelines for national execution had been developed through an inter-agency process. UNDP had contributed chapters on national execution and the programme approach to the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions manual on operational activities.

32. He noted that a full report on the dissemination of information to country offices regarding the follow-up to global conferences would be made available to the Executive Board at the present session. He informed the Board that at the special session of the Economic and Social Council in May, UNDP would make a special presentation on collaboration with the OECD/DAC, World Bank and United Nations in the development of indicators to monitor progress in meeting the goals of international conferences.

33. In response to the query raised, he noted that the concept of agency ratings mentioned in the joint UNDP/Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) publication "Measuring and Managing Results: Lessons for Development Cooperation" merely implied that if aid agencies had a uniform rating system for assessing their respective activities, it could provide a basis for comparing the performance of the assistance they provided in different fields. An upcoming headquarters and country-level workshop in Santo Domingo would examine the lessons of the report as they applied to UNDP.

34. With regard to the comments on the human rights policy document, he underlined that UNDP assistance was unconditional and that programme countries had the right to be free from poverty. He agreed that the humanitarian segment was a key part of the Economic and Social Council session, especially in the current year, when the linkage with development would be discussed. Progress in decentralization was also worth examining, he stated, noting that UNDP had decentralized most of its programming operations except for the approval of the CCF.

35. The Associate Administrator stated that UNDP would endeavour to incorporate the suggestions made by delegations at the present session in the report of the following year. He noted that the time-frame of some CCFs had been adjusted in order to enable harmonization of programming cycles among the funds and programmes. There had been some progress in harmonization with regard to the presentation of budget formats among the funds and programmes. Direct execution, he underlined, was an exception which occurred in countries in special development situations where rapid delivery was needed or where the Government had requested UNDP to take action.

[36. The Executive Board approved the following decision:]